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#### NATO AND THE MBFR TALKS

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ANNCR:

LEADERS OF THE ATLANTIC PACT NATIONS MEET HERE, IN WASHINGTON THIS COMING TUESDAY TO REVIEW DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THEIR LAST CONFERENCE IN LONDON A YEAR AGO. WITH A BACKGROUND REPORT HERE IS VOA'S JULIAN GORSKI:

VOICE:

IT'S FAIR TO ASSUME THAT THE CURRENT TALKS ON EAST-WEST MUTUAL BALANCED FORCE REDUCTIONS IN VIENNA WILL BE HIGH ON THE AGENDA OF THE FORTHCOMING SUMMIT. THE MBFR TALKS RECESSED LAST MONTH AFTER WESTERN NATIONS SUBMITTED PROPOSALS DESIGNED TO BREAK THE FIVE-YEAR IMPASSE IN REACHING A FORCE REDUCTION AGREEMENT. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSALS WERE NOT REVEALED. BUT PRESS REPORTS FROM VIENNA DESCRIBED THEM AS GOING TO GREAT LENGTHS TO ACHIEVE A PARITY BETWEEN NATO AND WARSAW PACT FORCES IN CENTRAL EUROPE.

THE WEST, ACCORDING TO THESE REPORTS, WOULD DROP ITS ORIGINAL DEMAND FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF 69,000 SOVIET TROOPS AND 1,700 SOVIET TANKS FROM EAST GERMANY. INSTEAD, THE REPORTS SAID, THE SOVIETS WOULD BE GIVEN THE OPTION TO PULL OUT THE SAME AMOUNT OF MEN AND ARMOR BUT FROM A LARGER AREA. THIS AREA IS SAID TO INCLUDE POLAND AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA AS WELL AS EAST GERMANY. THE UNITED STATES REPORTEDLY OFFERED TO CUT BACK ITS TROOP STRENGTH IN CENTRAL EUROPE BY 29,000 MEN. EARLIER, WASHINGTON HAD EXPRESSED ITS WILLINGENESS TO WITHDRAW SOME OF ITS NUCLEAR ARSENAL, AIRCRAFT AND MISSILES FROM EUROPE. IN ANOTHER INITIATIVE, NATO MEMBERS REPORTEDLY PROPOSED THAT BRITAIN, BELGIUM, CANADA, WEST

GERMANY, HOLLAND LUXEMBOURG CARRY OUT TROOP REDUCTIONS, PROVIDED CZECHOSLOVAKIA, EAST GERMANY AND POLAND DID LIKEWISE.

THERE HAS BEEN NO PUBLIC RESPONSE BY THE WARSAW PACT TO THE WESTERN PROPOSALS. BUT WEST GERMAN CHANCELLOR HELMUT SCHMIDT SAID SOVIET PRESIDENT BREZHNEV DID NOT TOTALLY REJECT THE WESTERN PROPOSALS WHEN THE TWO MEN MET IN BONN EARLIER IN THE MONTH.

IT'S GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER, THAT THE MAJOR STICKING POINT IN THE MBFR NEGOTIATIONS IS THE QUESTION OF PARITY. NATO ESTIMATES GIVE THE WARSAW PACT A 150,000 MEN AND 9,000 TANK EDGE OVER THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE IN CENTRAL EUROPE. BUT THE WARSAW PACT GROUPS INSISTS THAT THE FORCES ARE VIRTUALLY EQUAL AND THAT, THEREFORE, THE REDUCTIONS MUST BE TOO.

OF CONSIDERABLE CONCERN TO THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE IS THE CONTINUING SOVIET BUILDUP OF ITS CONVENTIONAL ARMED STRENGTH ALONG THE EAST-WEST EUROPEAN DEMARCATION LINE. U.S. DEFENSE SECRETARY HAROLD BROWN REFERRED TO THIS PROBLEM WHEN HE PRESENTED HIS DEFENSE BUDGET TO CONGRESS EARLIER IN THE YEAR. THE DEFENSE BUDGET INCLUDES HIGHER EXPENDITURES TO MODERNIZE THE WEAPONS OF AMERICAN FORCES IN EUROPE. THE AIM IS TO IMPROVE THE ABILITY OF NATO TO WITHSTAND A SUDDEN ATTACK BY WARSAW PACT FORCES.

WESTERN OBSERVERS CONCEDE THAT CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTIES FACE THE VIENNA NEGOTIATORS. BUT THEY ALSO SEE SIGNS OF PROGRESS IN THE TALKS. AT NATO' MINISTERIAL MEETING LAST DECEMBER, U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS VANCE SAID IT WAS NATO'S UNANIMOUS OPINION THAT PROGRESS IS NOW IN THE INTEREST OF BOTH SIDES. AND A SPOKESMAN FOR THE 12 WESTERN COUNTRIES REPRESENTED IN THE MBFR TALKS SAID THE TALKS ARE ENTERING A DECISIVE STAGE. WHETHER OR NOT AGREEMENT IS REACHED ON THE BASIS OF THE WESTERN PROPOSALS, HE SAID, DEPENDS ON THE EASTERN RESPONSE. BUT, HE ADDED, THE WEST NOW SEES THE POSSIBILITY OF AN AGREEMENT.